THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) India and the US have been engaged in a high-level intensive dialogue since June 1998. The latest round of Indo-US talks was recently held in New Delhi from January 29—31, 1999.

(b) The Indian side was led by Shri Jaswant Singh, External Affairs Minister. The US delegation was let by US Deputy Secretary of State, Mr. Strobe Talbott. The main interlocutors have been designated to conduct the dialogue as representatives of the Prime Minister of India and the president of USA respectively. A compact team of officials from both sides assisted the two leaders.

The talks were conducted over three days in plenary sessions as well as smaller groups of designated officials. In addition, Mr. Strobe Talbott also called on the PM, RM and leaders of some political parties.

The talks are being conducted on the basis of comprehensive proposals that India put forward on disarmament and non-proliferation matters, namely a unilateral moratorium on explosive nuclear tests, willingness to discuss converting it into a de jure obligation, decision to enter into contructive negotiations on the FMCT and reaffirming our policies on stringent control on export of sensitive technologies.

After several rounds the talks had narrowed and are now focussed on four issue related to security, disarmament and non-proliferation namely CTBT, FMCT, Export Controls and Defence Posture.

Both delegations have expressed satisfaction over the outcome of the talks. As in earlier meetings, the security perspectives of the two sides were further clarified with a view to harmonising respective perspectives.

It has been decided that Indian-US expert level teams will meet in March for follow-up talks on export controls. The leaders of the delegations will also remain in contact. While these talks continue, both sides will endeavour to create a positive atmosphere for advancing their relations.

(c) Yes Sir. A joint statments was issued on January 31, 1999 at the conclusion of this round, wherein both sides expressed satisfaction with the outcome of the talks. The text of the Statement is attached.

(d) Both sides recognised that the purpose of the talks is to lay the foundation of a broad-based relationshiup between India and the United States. In his correspondence with the Prime Minister, the President of the United States of America has expressed his desire for a board-based relationship that befits the largest democracies of the world. We have reciprocated these sentiments. Such a broad-based relationship will include cooperation in a range of areas such as trade and investment, science and technology, defence, academics and culture. We feel that progress in the ongoing dialogue would provide further momentum to bilateral relations, which is desired by both countries.

Visit to Pakistan

374. KUMARI NIRMALA DESHPANDE: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the newspaper reports about P.M.'s proposed visit to Pakistan by bus are correct;

(b) if so, whether any date has been fixed; and

(c) what is the reponse from Pakistan to this gesture by India?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) to (c) In response to an invitation by the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Mr. Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, the Prime Minister of India, Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee visited Pakistan from 20-21 February 1999 on the inaugural run of the Delhi-Lahore-Delhi bus service.

Rail link between Dhaka and Calcutta

375. KUMARI NIRMALA DESHPANDE: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether a proposal to restart the rail link between Dhaka and Calcutta is being discussed between the Government of India and the Government of Bangladesh;

(b) if so, whether there is any proposal to restart the old rail link between Calcutta and the North-East; and

(c) whether it is being contemplated to link Agartala with Assam by railway?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) Rail links already exist between India and Bangladesh. There are two broad gauge connections at Gede (India)-Darsana (Bangladesh) and Singhabad (India)-Rohanpur (Bangladesh) and two meter gauge connections at Radhikapur (India)-Birol (Bangladesh) and Mahisasan (India) and Shahbazpur (Bangladesh).

(b) Government have repeated proposals to the Government of Bangladesh for transit facilities for passenger and freight traffic by rail.

(c) Yes, Sir.

Use of Bhutan as militant base

376. DR ALLADI P. RAJKUMAR: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether India expressed concern over the use of Bhutan as militant base by North-Eastern insurgent groups;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the assistance given/proposed to Bhutan for drive against the insurgents?

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI JASWANT SINGH): (a) to (c) The presence of North-Eastern militants on Bhutanese territory has been a subject of discussion with Bhutan. Both sides share concerns on this issue, which was discussed at length in the National Assembly of Bhutan at its last session in June-July 1998. The National Assembly recognised the danger posed by these militants to Bhutan itself and sought to find the most appropriate ways and means to move them from their territory. India and Bhutan have been in regular touch to find a solution to this issue and are cooperating with each other in this regard.

परमाणु परीक्षणों के उपरांत भारत-अमेरिकी वार्ता

377. **डा० महेश चन्द्र शर्मा:** क्या **विदेश** मंत्री यह बताने की कृपा करेंगे कि:

(क) पिछले वर्ष मई में किये गये परमाणु परीक्षणों के उपरांत प्रारंभ हुई भारत-अमेरिकी वार्ताओं का ब्यौरा क्या है;

(ख) क्या इन वार्ताओं के आठवें दौर में अफगानिस्तान के बारे में भी चर्चा हुई थी; और

(ग) यदि हां, तो तत्संबंधी ब्यौरा क्या है?

विदेश मंत्री (श्री जसवन्त सिंह): (क) भारत और संयुक्त राज्य अमरीका जून, 1998 से उच्च स्तरीय गंभीर बातचीत में लगे हुए हैं। भारत-अमरीका वार्ता का अद्यतन दौर नई दिल्ली में 29-31 जनवरी, 1999 के बीच हुआ था।

भारतीय पक्ष का नेतृत्व विदेश मंत्री श्री जसवन्त सिंह ने किया। अमरीकी शिष्टमंडल का नेतृत्व अमरीकी उप विदेश मंत्री श्री स्ट्रोब तालबोट ने किया। प्रमुख वार्ताकारों को बातचीत करने के लिए क्रमशः भारत के प्रधान मंत्री